

# Report on The Lines of the West Flanders Railways

By George Stephenson, Esq.

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## West Flanders Railways.

### Directors.

W.P. Richards, President.  
W.G. Hayter, Vice-President.  
Right Hon. Sir E. Ryan.  
J.P. Fearon  
Lewis Cubitt  
W.D. Chantrell, Directeur Gebant in Belgium.

### Bankers.

Messrs. Glyn, Halifax and Co.

Office – 1 King William Street.

Bruges, July 1845.

To the Directors of the West Flanders Railways Company  
11, King William Street, London

Gentleman,

I beg leave now to lay before you the result of my examination of the Lines of Railway in Belgium, conceded to your company.

In the first place I deemed it necessary to take a view of the whole country through which these Lines pass; and, before I make my marks as to whether any alterations can be made in the Lines now laid down, I will give you the outlines of the route I pursued.

Accompanied by Mr. Edward R. Starbuck, I arrived at Calais on the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup> instant.

We were met by Mr. Peter E. Henderson, who had carefully prepared all the requisite plans for my proceeding with the examination of the country; these I found so ably done, as, with his explanations, greatly to lessen my labour in the discharge of this duty.

Leaving Calais, we proceeded by Gravelines to Dunkirk, Furnes, Dixmude, Lichtervelde, Thielt, Deynze, Courtrai, Menin, Wervicq, Ypres, Poperinghe, returning from the latter place to Courtrai.

( 4 )

Mr. Henderson having called my attention to the importance of an Extension of the Line from Courtrai to Bossuyt, so as to form a junction with the River Scheldt, I deemed this of sufficient weight to induce to examine the district; on which project I shall offer you my opinion hereafter. Again, returning to Courtrai, we then proceeded to Lendelede, Iseghem, Roulers, Thourout and lastly to Bruges.

The West Flanders Railways having for their object the supplying of West Flanders with Railway communication, and, by means of the State Lines and otherwise, to connect that important district with more important points in Belgium and France, I shall have to suggest to you some extensions which I consider will prove of great advantage to your project.

Taking up my comments at Furnes, I now proceed to lay before you my views of your Undertaking. The country from Furnes to Dixmude offers great facility for the construction of a Line of Railway. The neighbourhood of this place, for a considerable distance round, is a great grazing country, and from it a large traffic in cattle, &c. may be looked for. From Dixmude to Lichtervelde (near which the cross station will be placed) the Line still bears the same favourable character; but from the latter place to Thielt there are undulations, not however of a serious nature, the material being of an easy character to work, but the slopes will be required to be flat as the material holds water and is liable to slip. From Thielt to Deynze the Line is again highly favourable; that from Thielt to Aeltre has been carefully examined by Mr. Henderson, and from the information he has given me on this portion of your project, as also from my own opinion of

( 5 )

the inutility of this Branch, I recommend in the strongest manner the abandonment of the idea of its construction, and instead thereof the continuance of the Line from Thielt to Deynze, as provided for in your Convention. At Deynze you join the State Line, about 10 miles from Ghent; which connection will be easily made, and will no doubt be of great benefit to your Lines, as the connection will form a complete communication between the rich agricultural districts of Furnes, Dixmude, Roulers, Thourout, and the whole of the centre of West Flanders, with Ghent, Antwerp and Brussels.

The total length of this Line is about 37 miles, and the population of the town through which it passes (exclusive of small villages, which are considerable) stand thus:

Furnes	4,757
Dixmude	3,614
Lichtervelde	6,194
Thielt	12,712
Deynze	3,586

The extension of this Line to Dunkirk and Calais will be of real benefit, the ground being extremely favourable for a Railway, and if formed will make a direct communication from the above-mentioned ports to Brussels.

I will now offer my observations on the Line from Courtrai to Poperinghe. From Courtrai to Menin, as also from Menin to Wervicq, the country presents great facility for the continuance of the Railway. Proceeding from the latter place to Ypres, the route pursued will require some considerable cuttings to obtain favourable gradients: the material is of the same description as before mentioned, while, on the contrary, from Ypres to Poperinghe the Line is carried over a very favourable

( 6 )

district, passing through the centre of a very rich hop and flax district, of which Courtrai is the market.

Mr. Henderson has suggested a deviation from the Line laid down in your map between Menin and Ypres, viz, by going round to Wervicq; in this I coincide. The length of this Line now defined is about 25 miles, and the town population stands thus:

Courtrai	18,829
Menin	8,161

Wervicq	5,711
Ypres	17,322
Poperinghe	10,457

I now come to the district from Courtrai to Bruges, which is so favourable, that the Line will be carried in a more direct course than is now marked on your Map, the whole approaching nearly to a plain. It commences on the State Line from Brussels to Tournai to Lille, at the station at Courtrai, and forms a Junction, at the Station of the State Line from Brussels to Ostends, at Bruges, passing through the following towns-

Courtrai	19,829
Lindelede	4,187
Iseghem	8,887
Roulers	10,320
Lichtervelde	6,194
Thourout	8,438
Bruges	49,383

The length of this Line is about 30 miles, while the distance by the State Railway from Courtrai to Ghent, and from Ghent to Bruges, is about 51 miles, showing a saving of 21 miles by your Railway, which must ensure you the whole of the Traffic between these towns.

( 7 )

Mr. Henderson has now in hand the Plan and Section of the different proposed Extensions of your Undertaking: the one to Bossyut (complying with the Standing Orders of the Minister of Public Works) will be placed in the hands of your Resident Director, with proper engineering instructions, in the course of ten days. This Plan I shall lay before you.

The Working Plans, Sections, &c. of the district from Bruges to Courtrai are in course of preparation; and as this part of your Line is exceedingly favourable, the Works will be executed rapidly; it will connect Bruges, containing with its arrondissement 111,000 inhabitants, with Courtrai, containing with its arrondissement 140,000, and a populous intermediate district. From the character of the country, &c. there can be no difficulty in completing this section in a year.

The Line from Furnes to Deynze may also be commenced as soon as the Plans and Sections are prepared. The remaining Line, from Courtrai to Poperinghe, may follow as soon as you deem it expedient; and I doubt not that the whole of your Lines may be finished in two years.

As soon as Mr. Henderson has completed the various Sections, I shall go into the details of the Estimate; in the interim I may state, that in my opinion (as far as it can be formed without the Sections) the Capital named will be sufficient for the completion of the Undertaking.

I remain, Gentlemen,  
Your very obedient Servant,  
GEORGE STEPHENSON.